

[Ella Bartlett]

Paper [6?] Ella Bartlett - New England Gentility Mass. 1938 - [?]

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As I swept off the snow left by the last and very unwelcome storm, I looked down the street and saw a weary little figure fighting the strong wind that was literally tossing it from one side of the walk to the other. It was Ella Bartlett, red of nose and blue of cheek.

“For goodness sake, come in this house this minute before you freeze to death,” I cried.

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In she came, numb from the cold, and meekly let us take off wraps and galoshes and fuss over her generally as we tried to make her comfortable. It was not like Ella Bartlett to be meek and we wondered.

Finally she spoke, "Well, I guess I'm a mite warmer now."

"Where did you have to go that you got yourself in this condition?" I scolded.

"Didn't have to go anywhere, I jest went. I was feelin' mopish an' I went across th' river to see how th' old house looked an' that made me bluer and bluer an' I jest been walkin' 'round."

Sensing that she wanted to talk I lead her on to tell me about this big old house that used to be her home.

"It was a beautiful home, my home, 'bout th' prettiest anywheres 'round here. It was made of weatherboards, inlaid with bricks, that's what made th' walls thick, it was painted white. Course in those days white houses stayed white, didn't have so much smoke an' dust, like today. 2 "All 'round th' house there was a fence that was called a 'post an' rail' fence, that's made with places out in th' posts an' th' rails'd be made all smooth an' nice an' they'd fit in th' places cut in th' posts, then it was whitewashed.

"There was a great big porch that had a railin' all 'round it. We used to sit out there every time we could. There was a wide hall that ran right from th' porch to th' back of th' house.

"On one side was a big livin' room, we called it a settin' room those days. It had a great big fireplace in it, and then th' kitchen was back of that an' back of that again, was a good-sized room that had a stove in it an' when it got hot in th' summer time they'd cook out there, an' that room was hitched onto th' barns so's th' men didn't have to go out doors in th' winter time.

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“Right across th’ hall from th’ settin’ room was th’ ‘best’ room. We never called it th’ parlor. Then upstairs was th’ sleepin’ rooms, of course an’ on top of th’ hule house was th’ attic an’ how I loved that attic, full of all kinds of things that us children would play with all day long.

“We had th’ loveliest carpet in th’ beat room, sort of pink, only a little deeper then pink, with big scroll like figures that had flowers kind’o fallin’ out of ‘em. It was a Brussels carpet. I remember goin’ to school one day when I was about ten an’ boastin’ 3 that we had Brussels carpet in every bedroom in our house. Wasn’t that dreadful - but we did have them.

“We had such pretty furniture in that room, too, two big sofas, covered with a dark red velvet that had little baskets of gay flowers all over it. There was a big rockin’ chair an’ a little one an’ they both had th’ prettiest cushions on th’ seats. Then there was a high boy an’ a low boy an’ three of th’ awfulest uncomfortable straight back chairs you ever set in. Then there was two tables, marble top on one. Th’ one in th’ middle of th’ room was big an’ among th’ things on it was a beautiful bouquet of flowers made of feathers under a glass case an’ there was two big glass lamps with prisms.

“There was some foot stools scattered around with ‘petty’ point covers an’ there was three big portraits with heavy gold frames, hangin’ on th’ walls.

“Th’ curtains was hardly ever raised in that room, except on special occasions - Thanksgivings an’ Christmas’s an’ funerals. I used to sneak in there an’ play I was a grand lady come to call, I’d sit there alone in th’ dark for hours, Mother always knew where to find me if I disappeared.

“Th’ settin’ room didn’t have a carpet. it It had wide, wide boards that was almost white an’ it used to be wiped about twice a day with a clean, damp mop an’ then th’ mop’d have to be washed all clean so’s it would be all right to use th’ next time. 4 “Th’ chairs in that room was of th’ kind they called Windsor, well, they do yet, if it comes to that. Th’ chairs was

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cherry. You don't see much cherry, nowadays, I used to think it was a right pretty wood. There was a beautiful bureau stood in one corner. It has a lot of fancy work on it, big claw feet and lovely glass knobs, [you've?] You've seen it, in my room an' th' high boy an' th' low boy, too.

"The melodeon was in that room, so's I could practice. [Th'?] walls was white, there wasn't any pictures, th' window shades was made of green paper an' there was white curtains at th' windows. I It may not sound so good to you but honest, it was awful nice.

"Honest, I've yet to see any place as nice as ours, inside or out. Everything was so neat. In those days we didn't have any springs on our bedsteads, so, we'd have a straw bed under our feather beds to make 'em springy. Every spring th' ticks'd be washed an' new straw put [in,?] an' I remember how my father would follow long to watch so's none of th' straw would fall on th' ground an' make th' yard look untidy.

"My, but it was a nice house. My grandmother always used to say it was one of the best in Brookfield - and I guess it was. My father was awful [?] proud about his home and awfully fussy to have things nice. He was a wonderful man - my father and he knew so much. I don't believe there was anybody in Brookfield knew any more than he did. 5 "Goodness, here I been talkin' on all about myself and braggin' like anythin'. But it's all true - every word of it." Miss Ella's voice held a note of defiance and her black eyes looked squarely at me as she arose and prepared to depart.

"I know it is," I answered in what I hoped was a soothing tone. "Mr. Kinne has told me about your father - what a splendid man he was, and about your lovely home."

"Mr. Kinne was most kind to say such things," was her prim reply. "I have always thought Mr. Kinne a most intelligent and fair-minded man. Good-day, and thank you."

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As I stood at the window and watched Miss Ella, in her outmoded black coat struggling against the wind, I thought of the small cold room where she was spending the last years of a life that had begun so happily in the big white house across the river.